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## Aa

## HELDON



Richard Pinhas

**The Electronic Guerillas**

by Doug Walker

When considering the preponderance of electronic music available today, the questions of 'art versus trend' and of commercially safe casually-suggested-purposeless-violence quickly influence the listener's attempts to draw substance (i.e. originality, passion, technical ability, and full expression) from what is heard.

Both the 'new age' and the 'art-noise' clans seem to wallow in self-indulgent technique and philosophy; both have in common the inability to assault the 'western' (read: EMPIRICAL) view of creative music. They seem incapable of using their ability to create something truly unconventional; at worst, some retreat to corrupt ideologies of nihilism and decadence.

This may or may not be the fault of the artists; obviously the creator faces a hostile environment when attempting to slip 'unconventional' ideas past music industry barons. Thus many an artist will develop only the most superficial aspects of his or her concept in order to remain afloat financially. In most cases (with exceptions being Cabaret Voltaire and Peter Dinklage) the artist becomes a parody of himself, retreading familiar conceptual and artistic standards (like Tangerine Dream). Artists of integrity often suffer, being unwilling to make their creations shallow or bland.

French composer/improviser Richard Pinhas is an artist who has not altered his

musical stance, yet has been able to advance the scope of his musical conceptions during the twelve years that he has led Heldon, while working in the solo idiom as well. Using various synthesizers, electric guitar, tapes, and Mellotrons, he has created a music of thick, dense texture; yet it maintains rhythmic grace and movement. Sonic blocks, like slabs of great stone, decorate Pinhas' musical environs; instruments create a hellish atmosphere building tension and catharsis as the listener is guided through the aural landscape suggested and created by the music.

Richard Pinhas uses EMS, Arp, Moog 55, C&B, Mellotron, E-Mu, Didier Bady, and Serge synthesizers, and a 1954 Les Paul guitar. Effects are many and varied. He has been recording and composing Heldon music since 1973, producing thirteen albums of material. Each record has been a progression on the one before it. Five discs from this body of work will be examined here, as these albums show the group's evolution, its increasing sophistication, and the joy of expressing new ideas in a free and unfettered manner.

Heldon III, *It's Always Rock & Roll*, was released in late 1975 on Urus Records, a company run by Pinhas, Gilbert Artman (of *Laid Free* and *Urban Sax* fame), and several other friends and supporters of the music. This is a four-sided affair, with two side-long tunes and two of shorter works; the album succeeds despite its ambitious nature (double albums are difficult for small companies). The musical structures are varied, encompassing drone/floating pieces and some more 'traditional' rock techniques, even foreshadowing the Industrial music community by more than three years.

Sides Two and Four really stand out: "Aurore" (who [?] also plays Indian harmonium here) begins with a dark bass drone around which synthesizers weave, occasionally making semi-tonal solo statements. The music encourages the listener to sink within itself rather than to float on top of it.

"Doctor Bloodmoney" (Side Four) is shaped around a driving sequencer patch, augmented by an array of cyclically sweeping VCF's. Synthesizer solos erupt from the densely swirling mix, and drums support the bottom end of the musical spectrum playing with and against the sequencer rhythm. Sides One and Three are shorter pieces of similar intent, and the entire album is mixed flawlessly, with the music floating all around the stereo field.

The next album of the five appeared in 1976, and marked some profound changes in electronic music. Heldon had become a stable band, and the results of this change can be heard on "A Dream Without Reason." The music here is both elastic and dense, and beats the current crop of 'industrialists' to the mark by nearly five to seven years (only the musicians in Heldon control their machines—many of the contemporary folk seem to get this crucial part of electronic music-making backwards).

Primary instrumentation on the disc is synthesizers and guitar (Pinhas), drums (Francis Auger), and various keyboard synths (Patrick Gauthier). Once again the sound is dominated by sequencers with which the rhythmic instruments create landscapes for the solo voice—usually Pinhas' deft guitar. The music never becomes trite or pretentious as the players give an abundance of energy and technique to the compositions.

American listeners were able to obtain the group's music, as this album was released domestically on Inner City (see *discography*), but failed to generate any interest or reviews, and the company (which has an admirable jazz catalogue) had no idea how to promote the band. Heldon began to offer a number of live performances, which were costly, as the group brought the required amount of equipment along to recreate what had been played in the studio; yet the group worked northern France, and in England.

Pinhas' first solo album *Chronolyse* was released in conjunction with *A Dream Without Reason*; the disc featured a study in eight parts of a sequencer patch and a long dronish affair featuring only the Moog on Side One, followed by Mellotron, guitar, and Heldon's rhythm section. Here the mix is subdued, almost relaxed without being flaccid; the variations roll, and each speaks its own language.

Side B features "Paul Artrides," a thirty-minute extravaganza of density created by the uniquely maligned Mellotron and droning synthesizer. About halfway through, Pinhas' double-tracked guitar peels mournfully over subtle yet effective bass and drums.

1977 saw a solo release by Pinhas entitled *Rhiosphere*, a Glass-like excursion. Surprisingly, guitar does not appear here, however the music shows no sign of weakness for lack of it. In 1978 Heldon 6, *Interface*, was released and represents the complete fruition and integration of the 'industrial' sound, and even makes a non-sense reference to the much-abused jazz-rock tradition. Pounding sequencer, electronically altered percussion, and blazing guitar dominate the sound. "Interface" occupies Side B; here the compositional elements are simple sequencer and 4/4 timing. All Heldon attributes are emphasized and Pinhas plays a breathtaking solo, never losing comprehension once in overdrive. My only criticism is that the track is twenty minutes—too short. At the end of the side, Pinhas refuses to let us forget that what we've heard is still rock n roll, albeit a logical extension of the music's evolution forged by fusing knowledge of roots with technology, emotion, and musical ability. Unfortunately, this was to be the last album recorded and released by Cobra/Urius Records, and this independent folded shortly thereafter. Heldon did a number of live performances, carrying the tons of equipment necessary to recreate onstage their mammoth studio sound.

Pinhas/Heldon signed on with Egg Records—the French progressive music label—continued to tour northwestern Europe, and released the LP *Standby*, which generated a great deal of interest with import buyers in England and the US.

On *Standby*, compositional style is similar to that of *Interface*, but leaning more towards the 'progressive' rock community. Arrangements are tight, with bass and drums setting up modal chord configurations as platforms for the sky-saw guitar work of Pinhas. As usual, the title cut "Standby" is the album's standout; the sequencer patching is especially graceful, and all the musicians sacrifice their egos to create a

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massive sound. On all levels, the full potential of Heldon could be heard here, however this was not to last. As stated in *Eurock* magazine (#18), Pinhas seemed to find it impossible to continue Heldon—the expenses of touring with an equipment-laden entourage becoming prohibitive—and disbanded the group in favor of a solo career.

The 1980's have seen four releases, but interestingly only *Iceland* has been purely solo: *L'Ethique*, *East/West*, and *Retrospective* have all featured tracks with the former groupings, or with players well known in the French electronic/progressive scene (Bernard Paganotti and Clement Bailey from the Magma axis among them). Patrick Gauthier's involvement with Pinhas has been continual, growing quietly into a musician to be awed by both emotionally and technically.

During 1981 and 1982 some concerts were given in Paris and London (excellent quality tapes of these shows turn up on trader's lists), with the instrumental groupings being highly praised by audience and music journalists who bothered to cover the performances. At the end of 1985 *Retrospective* was released by WEA Records (France); the album had been delayed for nearly three years, and featured recent studio cuts and one side of live material recorded between 1976 and 1978. Apparently the release was originally intended as a double live album, but WEA decided on rereleasing studio cuts to boost sales.

Despite the horrible editing of *Interface* between Sides One and Two, fans were able to get a piece of the classic live Heldon sound. Throughout Side Two, Auger's, Gauthier's, and Pinhas' playing amazes. "Marie Virginia C" (from *A Dream Without Reason*) is performed flawlessly, with a slight variation in the original sequencer patch to make it more sinister. Much criticism can be levelled at this recording for its poor track selection, bad editing, and lack of new material, but it is still an indispensable reference for those new to the music.

In 1986 there is a wealth of electronic music, composers, and performers; yet none have attempted to plow in this direction. It would serve all who practice this particular genre well to dig up these works, as they can become cherished references for the future of electronic music. It is to be hoped that we will be able to hear more from Pinhas in the years to come.

#### DISCOGRAPHY

Most of these records are out of print, but can be found if those interested do some research in auction and tape trading lists. Often a good import record shop can yield at least one of these.

#### Heldon:

- Heldon I— *Electronic Guerilla* Cobra COB37.019 (1974)
- Heldon II— *Alley-Teia* Unus 000.002 (1975)
- Heldon III— *It's Always Rock & Roll* Unus 000.006/7 (1975)
- Heldon IV— *Agneta Nilsson* Unus 000.011 (1976)
- (This is rereleased as Aural Explorer AE5001, and contains tracks from Heldon III)
- Heldon V— *A Dream Without Reason* Inner City 1021 (1976)
- (This was also released by Cobra Records)
- Heldon VI— *Interface* Cobra Records COB37.013 (1978)
- Heldon VII— *Standby* Egg Records BA215(900578) (1979)
- Heldon— *Retrospective* WEA 240303-1 (1985)
- (French catalogue only)

#### Richard Pinhas:

- Chronolyse* Cobra Records COB37.015 (1976)
- Rhiosphere* Aural Explorer AE5002 (1977)
- Iceland* Polydor POL350 (1980)
- East/West* Pulse Records 003 (1981)
- L'Ethique* Pulse Records 006 (1982)

#### With other artists:

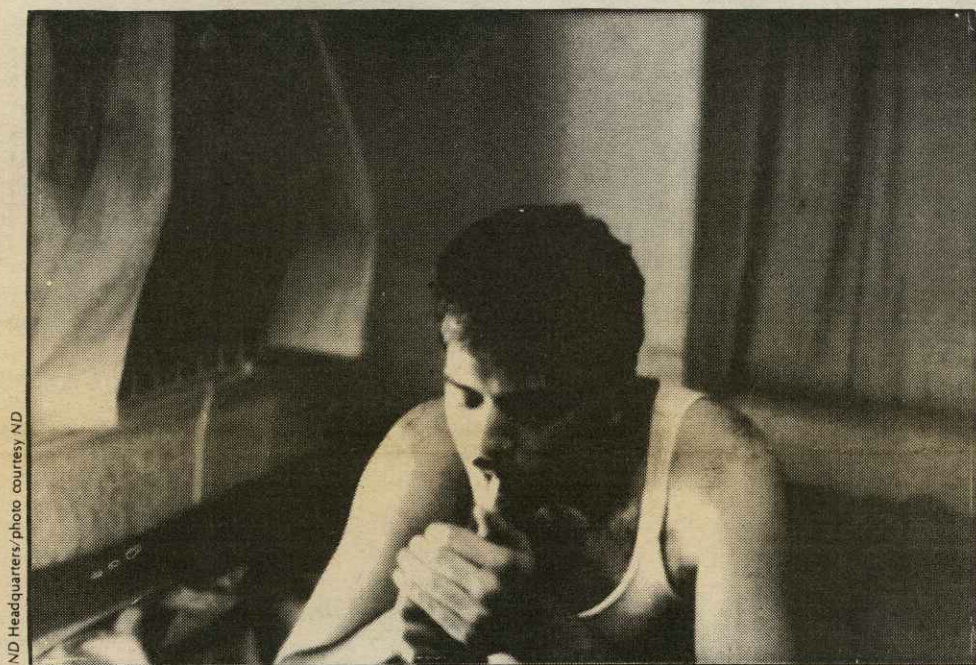
- Ose:** *Adonia* (composed by Herve Picait) Egg Records 90277 (1978)
- Patrick Gauthier: *Bebe Godzilla* WEA CY733612
- Metal Urbaine: "Panik" seven-inch Cobra COB47.004 (1977)
- (an early French 'industrial' group, produced by Pinhas)

#### Tapes:

- Heldon, Paris 6/26/75 —Paris radio concert
- Heldon, Mancy 3/79 —hard to get, but a fine show
- Heldon, Paris 4/27/81 —excellent quality
- Pinhas, London 5/19/82 —live concert

—Doug Walker

## MAIL-IN: ND



It has been with a quiet but steady commitment that *ND* magazine has been issued from a seemingly barren Lone Star State. The commitment itself is manifold in character. Unlike a fanzine its approach is varied, and its dedication is more to a performance aesthetic than to the reportage of cool products and band gigs. Rather, *ND* uses its natural curiosity to investigate some of the impulses behind eclectic (as semantically opposed to extreme) performance, and allows artists the dignity of their own first-person voice within a supportive context and a stylized graphic appearance.

With a bold use of color, line, and floating text, *ND* lays waste the slapdash appearance of fanzines; its carefully ordered look owes much to the simple shape-juxtapositions of the early Futurists—Kurt Schwitters among them. This is done without the poppy, brash, pseudo-punkiness of modern women's magazines, but rather with a clear sense of order and purpose of design. All of this makes a positive symbolic statement about the state of "performance art" today. It is not that *ND* publishes frequently, or even that exciting performance work need be in the environment all the time; it is enough that this well-constructed journal speaks for its vibrancy, and for its potential. For this at least, performance culture needs an *ND*.

The following questionnaire constitutes a dialogue between the publishers of *ND* and A/a; the questionnaire returned by A/a Central appears in *ND* 6.

□□□□

#### 1. Give some historical background into the people and experience at *ND*.

The first issue of *ND* was put out in 1982 after I first moved to Austin from Arlington Texas (near Dallas/Fort Worth). It was more or less like a listing of cassette groups and mail artists that I was in contact with at the time. When I first started I wanted *ND* to be like a newsletter that would come out once a month, but my money situation at the time was bad enough that I could barely afford stamps. At this time I was involved with a lot of cassette trading, and I wanted more or less to have *ND* be an extension of that. Also at this time Kurt Kren moved in with me, and we were both broke. So it wasn't until a year later that *ND* 2 came out, which had an interview with Kurt plus more contacts and material that I had been sent. Another year passed and two friends from Arlington moved down as well, and we put out *ND* 3 and 4. Then Dave moved to Los Angeles, but with some other help *ND* 5 was put out. [The release date for *ND* 6 was July 1986]. The people involved with *ND* have been David Mitchum, Beth Mitchell, Craig Dickerson, and Joe Prigmore. Everyone except me has moved to Los Angeles and San Francisco, and only I remain in the rattling state of Texas. That gives the background, as the experience has changed daily.

#### 2. Artist contacts are important to *ND*. Which of these do you prize most highly?

Actually there are too many to mention. Contacts seem to fade in and out. However there are several who I have been in contact with for years. And there are always new and exciting ones that seem to appear; people like Kurt Kren, David Minshall (who used to put out *Grok*), and others who have helped me get in touch with people. The ones I prize most are the ones where the dialogue continues.

#### 3. *ND*'s graphic appearance is distinctive. Talk about the design of the magazine.

I'm glad you think it is distinctive; one of the better comments I've heard. We hope to have *ND* 6 printed on a better press, but we've usually tried to get them out as cheaply as possible. Anyway, things are borrowed from other magazines: the size we stole from

*Talk Talk*; I always liked that size, always tried to make it like a sort of MERZ book. The process is usually where all material sent in is spread all over my bedroom floor and then pasted up. We actually use a T-square now! There is always a lot of room to try different ideas. I have no idea what the magazine will look like until we get it back from the printer, sometimes pleasantly surprised or upset, as there are times when some stuff is not readable.

#### 4. Is there any interesting performance work in Texas? What do you think performing artists in this country have in common with those of other countries?

As far as Texas goes, I have yet to see much. Most of it seems directed towards theater; which isn't bad, but there is a lot of room for growth. The last two shows I have seen could have been squeezed down to just having the performer say "I'm an artist, look at me" over and over, rather than the whole elaborate set up in which he belched and talked about how clever and how avant he was. They got really boring, and the audience either got drunk or left. As far as comparing performers in this country to those in others, that would be difficult and perhaps not valid. Depends upon the actual artist. Sorry, not much of an answer.

#### 5. Do you think that the style of extreme performance has changed over the past few years? If so, what do you think has caused these changes?

Again, this is difficult. It also has to take into account one's idea or definition of extreme. As far as I can tell there is a wide array of activity, and it is constantly changing. I see no evidence of a certain movement of artists unless you take into account certain groups, say in Japan or Belgium like Club Moral. The style is constantly changing, depending upon the person concerned and their approach. But given the whole range it is difficult to pinpoint any specific changes without sounding too academic.

#### 6. What do you believe the connections are between "performance art" and "cassette culture"?

There exists with each various networks of people, publications, and spaces. Also, there are people who are involved in both worlds, or they incorporate aspects of both activities in their work. To these I would also add the various networks of mail artists, with some people being involved with all three fields, and even more networks. All of these activities are constantly growing and changing. As far as my personal viewpoint, the network for cassettes is wider, and a lot more support goes with it as well. But the support comes and goes.

#### 7. Describe a typical *ND* audience sample, if such be.

I'm not really sure on this one; mainly it's people involved in various tape and mail art activities. Or they're people who happened to pick it up in a shop and liked it; really all sorts.

#### 8. What is the work of putting *ND* together like?

Well like I said before, it is basically combining all of the mail and material that we have been sent on my bedroom floor. Also, we send out mail interviews to various people; I always liked the idea of interviews. They help to add a sort of dialogue as well as being a documentation of sorts. The interviews are probably the hardest work, plus at times they give the issue a possible focal point. It helps draw people in who otherwise would not pick up *ND*. Of course this is only a theory; I'm not sure if it works or not, but we try.

#### 9. What kind of goals does *ND* stand for?

Contact-Exchange-Document. This means, mainly, to become more and more involved with various people and projects. I think that this is the reason that *ND* will continue, as there are always fresh and varied ideas coming through the mail box. The magazine is the documentation of the process as well as being a tool for others—or so it is hoped. Anyway, an attempt is made to bring together a lot of thoughts and approaches; it just depends upon how good people are about writing to us.

#### 10. Are *ND* and its outgrowths an indefinite project?

As far as I can tell, yes. There are always lots of directions available, and ideas to make concrete. Texas is an excellent place to operate from, to take the time to develop ideas. Andre Stitt [*ND* 5] is coming to Texas and we will put that on here in Austin. We also hope to get other people to come through here. It has been an idea to open a small space and office. But that will take time and money, as well as more people who could take part. But we are getting there. It would be good to try it for a year, but I wouldn't want to be locked into it. *ND* should be not so much an institution as a vapor, like the Marfa lights. It should be added that *ND* 7 is to appear as a cassette in a certain magazine format, but that is as far as I can visualize it at this point. Maybe *ND* 9 as a videotape? Could be fun!

#### 11. How many licks does it take to get to the Tootsie Roll center of a Tootsie Pop?

I never found out. I always swallowed it whole. I liked the sensation of it exploding in my stomach.

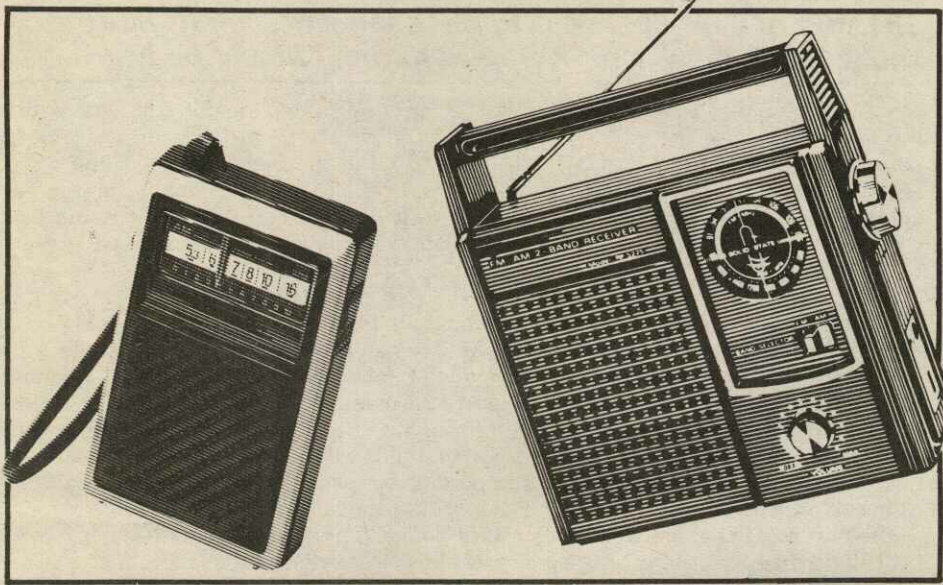
[Performance art lives...]

—Questions/Commentary: CH

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# "TROUBLESHOOTING LITTLE RADIO"



**Pollution Control's Radio "Shoulds" by Pennie Stasik and Mark Edwards**  
Partly in response to a number of articles in independent music publications which have recently taken various aspects of "alternative culture" to task, Pollution Control's editor/publishers presented this piece in their Issue #11 (April/May 1986). They combine their criticisms with their personal experience at station WCSB in Cleveland, at which PC members have presented such shows as "Triumph of the Will" by Timothy Steyskal and "Is This Small?" by Stasik. A random sample of these shows presented to A/a Central finds them to be original and far-reaching in terms of programming and presentation.

**Stasik:** I've run into nearly a bushel of articles/discussions in the past couple of months concerning issues of value with regard to independent/alternative music. Published pieces which leap to mind: David Ciaffardini's detailed discussion, "College Radio Crumbling?", appears in *Maximum Rock N Roll* #34 (PO Box 288, Berkeley CA 94701), as well as his ongoing tirades in *Sound Choice* (PO Box 1251, Ojai CA 93023); particularly the "call-and-response" reproduced in the current issue [#4] between himself and members of KRUI and KCSN. Mykel Board asks "Is college radio becoming a marketing arm of the Major Labels?" in "Sucking in the '80's," in PC member WFMU's station guide (Upsala College, East Orange NJ 07019)... and William Davenport's editorial in *Unsound* [Volume II, Issue #3/4] (801 22 Street, San Francisco CA 94107), in which infant questions poke through concerning the nature of hierarchies versus creativity.

*Pollution Control* is a mighty effort to spread the notion that diversity and its proliferation are among the more charming aspects of life. We happen to dig music intensely. Fertility is what we're after here. What PC is trying to do is to spread the message that the independent music world is a hotbed of styles and motivations. It is an amazing mixture that we think should be approached as a cluster rather than a simple unity. You can no more say what "independent music" sounds like than you can say what "food" tastes like. Yet while everyone craves food, each of us hankers after only certain kinds.

It seems to me that the "job" of music-oriented college radio is to present its listeners with as much variety as possible. And it seems to me that the "job" of Music Departments [of radio stations] is to provide their programmers with as much variety as possible. The Music Department should serve to challenge and excite its station's programmers by providing multitudinous amounts of music and by maintaining an open environment—one which encourages, rather than limits, wide-ranging and varied programming. The Music Department and other Departments, such as Programming, can work together to insure that incoming music programmers understand their "job" to be one of continuously searching for and opening up to new and diverse musics, making independent-minded choices a programming priority.

If such choice is to be encouraged it is essential that the power of promotion be confronted as the mechanism of influence which it most definitely is. It must be recognized that billions of dollars are not being spent each year by Major Labels for fun. College representatives have jobs for a reason: rep's are paid money to influence the musical tastes of the market. Majors have enough financial resources to conduct regular and frequent marketing surveys. If they didn't achieve considerable success by spending in this way, they wouldn't do it. The "results" are called Return On Investment.

It is amazing to me that so many college radio programmers and Music Departments consistently deny that they could be influenced/manipulated in their musical tastes through advertising. It is always unpleasant to believe that one is being manipulated unawares. However, it can be counteracted. To override it, you must begin by reminding yourself that the most successful manipulation is both subtle and alluring. The only way to circumvent it is, first, by paying meticulously close attention to details and, second, by setting up a system to counterbalance the effects of the manipulation. Knowing about a manipulation technique is the first, but only the first, step; knowledge is passive and not enough in and of itself. One must actively replace it with an alternative system which can achieve the desired response. Ideally, this response is an open-ended series of possibilities rather than some narrow range. Whether Major Labels are "good" or "bad" is not the issue here at all: the issue is whether college radio has any business being what effectually amounts to a low-overhead marketing subsidiary of the Majors. I think not.

Non-commercial radio should be an alternative to commercial radio (even if, in the United States, the FCC has relaxed its standards due to federal budget cuts). Commercial radio is a marketing arm for the Majors. It is hardly contestable at this point that labels must pay for radio time to "break" a new artist/record on commercial radio. Non-commercial radio is different, and this should ideally be reflected in both methods and attitude. Announcements are not "toy commercials"—they are pieces of useful information offered to listeners as a service. All programming, both music and non-music, can be seen as a service, for music, however "entertaining" it may in fact be, is loaded with information.

This is not at all to suggest that a non-commercial radio station should be a self-effacing organization. It is hardly to suggest that non-commercial/college stations shouldn't market themselves. But I do think that it is both entirely possible and desirable to reject the marketing role being thrust upon unwitting college stations, which ultimately results in a loss of individual identity in any case.

One college radio playlist should not reflect that of another. There is FAR too much music being produced for this to be justifiable. If you take a look at a cross-section of station playlists during some arbitrary period, you will notice that among the Majors and the few "major" indies (read: those with widespread distribution and substantial promotion and advertising budgets), a disproportionate selection of recordings appear over and over from playlist to playlist.

It is only at the level of indie label/self-produced music that this repetition breaks down. I see this unquestionably as being due to the fact that the small indies simply lack the resources that the Majors possess (and not, as is often argued, that musical "product"

being "offered" by Majors is simply "better" than that of indies). In part, this certainly results in fewer recordings being distributed, reducing their chances for appearing on playlists by the sheer weight of statistical probability. However this should not reduce the likelihood, in theory, of these recordings appearing on the playlists of stations who have received copies. Unfortunately this is not the case, and we at PC are in a position to state this with confidence.

What should be reflected in a station's playlist is the various tastes of the programmers—certainly a unique blend at each station, if only given the opportunity and encouragement to discover music available (usually the first or only time in their lives) in vast styles and quantities. It takes time to develop an inquiring, investigative musical ear, and sensitivity to music to which one has never before been exposed. And music discovered in isolation can be very exciting. It is important that an atmosphere exists which will allow this to occur. Rules requiring this or that to be played should be avoided altogether or at least kept to an absolute minimum. This does not imply that the Music Department should maintain a passive stance; instead, to direct programmers in the possibilities of exploration and independent decisions, Music Departments can make liberal use of suggestions and rationales, non-binding "guidelines," systems which tend to balance the visibility of obscure, independent labels/music (like making information easily available, utilizing a coding system which highlights indies as such, disproportionate lengths of time for indies in the "new" section versus Majors, playlists which reflect actual frequency of airplay by all programmers for all releases rather than a single individual's—or some small group's—musical preferences).

The bottom line is however that programmers play what they like. It is entirely reasonable to expect that any given programmer's preferences represent those of some share of a radio station's listenership. And individual taste being what it is, listeners will benefit from a wide variety of music programming styles, thus providing that unique service to the station's community (if you doubt that such radio can viably exist, you have obviously never listened to college radio in Cleveland, a city which has little else to brag about!). College radio should actively participate in the educational process, not merely through technical/business training but by providing an environment which encourages programmers in self-expression through exploration, resulting in a heightened musical awareness in the community. Long-range planning, as Major Labels well know, is impossible for any organization lacking a clear sense of its purpose and goals. These may take a while to develop, but it is the key to a solid future. —PS



**Edwards:** In this world, we are constantly being bombarded by new information from all sides. Changing technologies, changing philosophies, changing social and economic strata. For the stereotypical college student this world is combined with the emotional and psychological difficulties of breaking with the past and "finding one's niche." A ripe scenario for latching-on, one might think. Need for approval. In with the in crowd, and so on. Youth is a very impressionable animal, and the Major Labels do take full advantage of this while encouraging the stereotype ("All the other college stations are playing it, why aren't you?"). Majors are music business professionals, with high powered financial planners, accounting departments, and market research teams. They run the promotion/advertising trail on sleds with iced runners (while indies are forced to race the rapids, never knowing what's around the next turn). Youth can also be a very rebellious animal, and it seems to my eyes that in college radio, it's the numbers of the latter which are increasing. It's important to remember that college radio has only existed as more than a whisper in the public ear since the turn of the decade. Cleveland did not have a college station with over ten watts of power until 1980. Now it has three stations with 1,000. College stations have just begun to expand out of the dormitories and cafeterias of their host universities.

Because I still look upon most college radio with a rather enthusiastic eye, I must admit that my first reaction to the article in *Maximum Rock N Roll*, WFMU's program guide, and the bits in *Sound Choice* was a knee-jerk negative one. Mykel Board perceived a change (in "Is College Radio Becoming...?") as if a substantial percentage of stations which used to program a lot of indies do so no longer. While it is true that a great many stations exhibit the top alternative hits, I believe that this is a combination of three factors. First, the increased visibility of college radio in general. Many stations which haven't published their playlists before are now doing so. Second, network channels among the "established" indies are rapidly solidifying (how to get airplay for your record is not the big mystery it was a few years ago). Third, the Majors have recognized that college radio REACHES people they were missing despite all their ad money, and their huge promotional pressing runs allow them to cover all the stations. The stations I have known to be good ones, with only a few exceptions, are still good, and some of the shitty ones have much improved. There will always be an underground as long as there is a status quo. There will always be groups of dissatisfied people who will turn their backs on and thumb their noses at the mainstream. Even if they're all old farts who worked at cool stations back in the early 'eighties, man.

Meanwhile, if you happen to be one of those radio programmers teetering on the edge of "normalcy" (ie, "mainstream alternative"), and you don't know quite which way you'll fall, here are some questions to ask yourself which may help you gain your balance. First, do you believe that creative music can exist under the confines of mass marketing? Second, do you as a radio programmer recognize the importance and influence of your position in exposing music to the public (in this case, an alternative minded public, which is presumably listening to you because they chose you over commercial stations/mass marketing)? Third, do you recognize that this position entails some responsibility?

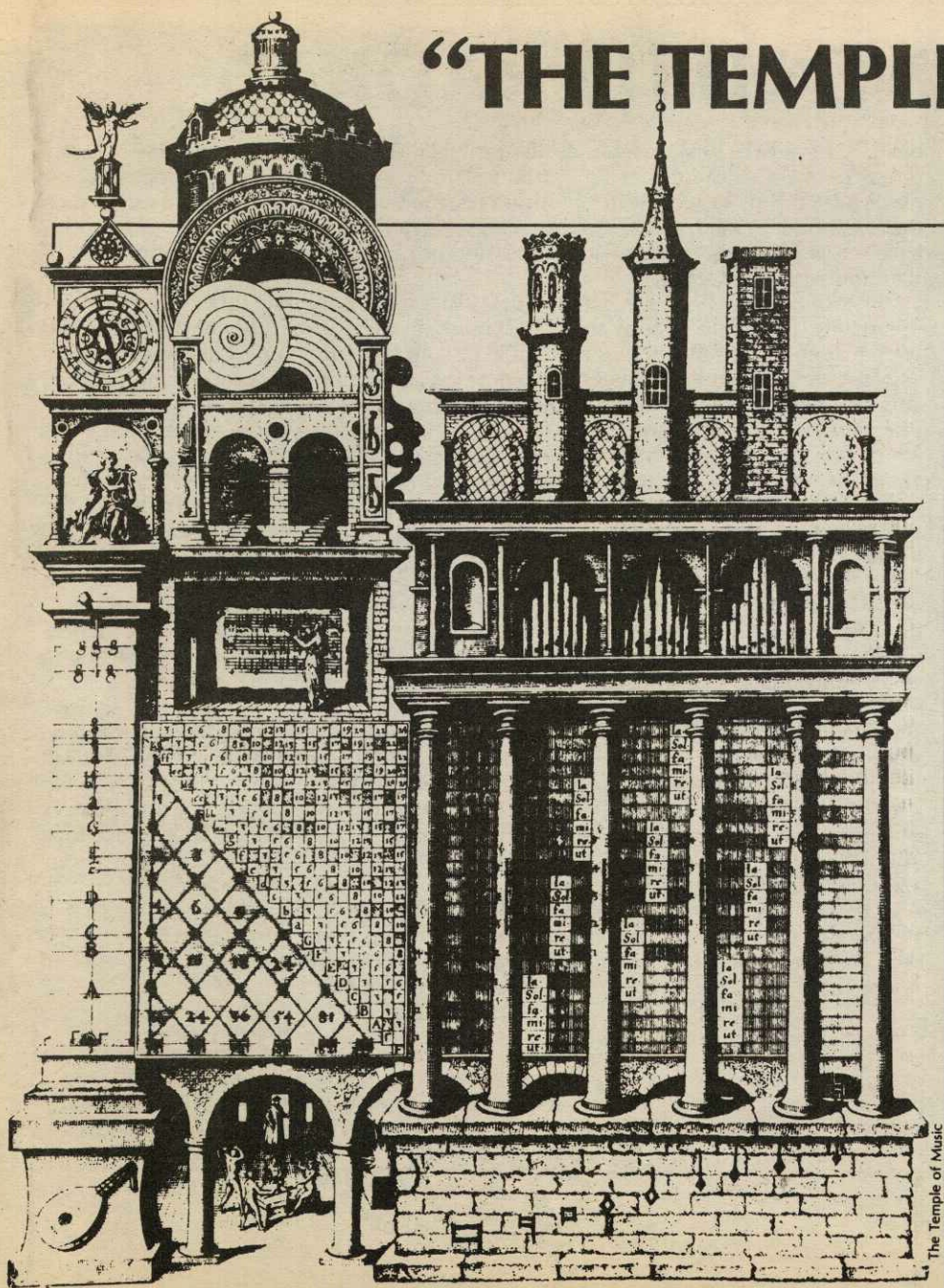
The "equal time" rule in the political arena was supposedly developed so that public information would not be skewed towards the views held by a single political party or candidate. No such rule exists for the music industry (which suits me just fine). But the point is that the Major Labels are vastly over-represented on the airwaves, and some of the responsibility for that one-sided dissemination of information in college radio falls squarely upon the shoulders of each individual programmer. You alone are responsible for the fact that a few hundred or a few thousand people could have heard Camper Van Beethoven for the first time in their lives instead of Talking Heads for the five thousandth. Radio programmers suffer (like everyone else) from an inescapable human weakness: laziness. If you constantly play records/tapes you are thoroughly familiar with, you may tell yourself you're being "selective," or that you choose only the "best" music. Laziness is a powerful force which is adept at rationalizing itself well. It is responsible for your musical ignorance, and that of your listening audience. Ignorance is a sin when the avenues available to combat it go unexplored or abused. —ME

Contact Zone: POLLUTION CONTROL, 1725 East 115 Street Cleveland OH 44106



# "THE TEMPLE OF MUSIC"

*The stuff of daily life needs to be "sounded"...for its more subtle implications and overtones to ring out and be heard.*



## The Musical Systems of ROBERT FLUDD

By Tom Moore

The English poet and mythmaker William Blake has a deserved reputation for having been a champion of imagination at a time when reason and empirical science were tightening their hold on western sensibility. But long before Blake, a countryman of his was taking a similar stand when mechanistic views were enjoying an equally warm reception during the promising years of their debut. Like Blake, this philosopher of imagination cut an eccentric figure so quaint that he has been largely overlooked by historians. He made his living as a Paracelsian physician while he worked out his philosophy in the dark symbols of alchemy, astrology, Hermetic magic, geomancy, and musical esoterism. Perhaps another reason for his notorious neglect among students of philosophy and history, a fanciful reason anyway, is the dull sound of his improbable name: Robert Fludd.

Fludd's lifespan straddle the beginnings of the seventeenth century: born in 1574, he lived well into the age of science until his death in 1637. One reason why he is of particular interest is that he was passionately concerned to defend a dimension of experience often foreign and unintelligible to rationalists and empiricists. Having one foot in the sacred world of the Middle Ages and Renaissance, and another in the newborn era of reason, science, and technology, Fludd is a symbol for the eternal problem of squeezing imagination into its place between naive religious belief and scientific reductionism. Fludd's loudest critics were the empiricists, Kepler and Marsenne in particular, forerunners of the white-frocked secular priesthood that manages our modern laboratories and computer terminals. But their criticisms drew some clarifications from Fludd which will help us understand the world that fascinated him: the realm of imagination.

Since Fludd wrote about matters that we usually keep in the cellars of history—such as magic and alchemy—he can easily be made into the object of occult fascination. Or, readers might be intrigued by his ingenuity and miss the real substance of his contribution. Fludd worked with unusual images, making an amalgam, for example, of astrology, cabala, and music; but it is clear that his concern was to depict faithfully the depth and complexity of reflective experience. One of his ancestors in a line of philosophers and theologians treading the fringe of orthodoxy was Nicholas of Cusa, who had made the observation that the deepest mysteries must be expressed in "enigmatic images." Fludd's imagery is enigmatic to be sure, but it should not be allowed merely to mystify and fascinate—it invites reflection on the nature and qualities of human consciousness.

A modern interpreter of Islam, Henry Corbin, delicately refines from his Sufi studies a notion which might elucidate the nature of Fludd's concern. Corbin speaks of a *mundus imaginalis*, an imaginal world where images themselves matter, where in fact they are the matter one works with, complete and sufficient in themselves. Psychologist James Hillman follows Corbin in claiming this imaginal realm as the primary concern of a depth psychology. Fludd of course did not use the languages of Sufism or psychology, yet his arguments with Kepler and Marsenne reveal that he was content to work with images, without the aid of lofty abstractions or empirical measurements.

A common attack against the *mundus imaginalis* complains that images are nothing more than subjective musings. In his own time, Fludd received similar criticism from Kepler, who argued that Fludd's work with planets and musical harmonies was merely "a fictitious world of his own." Fludd responded with his own disavowal of the abstractions of science: "Ordinary mathematicians are concerned with quantitative shadows," he wrote, "while Chemists [alchemists] and Hermetics grasp the true core [his word is *medulla*—marrow] of natural bodies." In other words, the intricate imagistic work of the more poetic philosophers touches the heart of nature, while the numbers of science only trace nature's surfaces. While Kepler was not the pure scientist one might find, staring at the night sky today, his primary interest was in measuring the movements of the planets accurately. In his numbers he found a "harmony," but he could not understand how Fludd could go beyond the sphere of planets and include in his diagrams of the macrocosm a sphere of angels. But it is the angels, drawn especially from cabalistic writings, that clearly place Fludd in the world of images rather than measurements. Again, as a way of understanding Fludd we might think of some modern visionaries who have acknowledged the value of an angelic order: Wallace Stevens ("A

Necessary Angel"), Rainer Maria Rilke ("The Angel...the creature in whom that transformation of the visible into the invisible we are performing already appears complete"), and James Hillman ("We need to recall the angel aspect of the word, recognizing words as independent carriers of soul between people"). If one can appreciate the role of angels without "believing in them," or counting their number on the head of a pin, or worst of all tracing their origin in hallucination, then one is ready to read Fludd.

Fludd comes out of a tradition—perhaps best called Hermetic, after Hermes Trismegistus its legendary founder—which favored not the evocative images of poetry but vast, complex symbol systems closely tied to nature. These seem to best reflect the complexity, inexhaustibility, and depth of the spheres of soul and spirit. Alchemy focused upon the tangible materials and processes of matter, astrology upon the movements of the visible planets. Fludd brought these and others of his wide-ranging studies together around a similar Pythagorean theme: the music of the macrocosm and microcosm. Like chemical reactions and predictable planetary movements, the sounds of music provide a natural base for metaphorical speculations.

The best way to get an overview of Fludd's musical philosophy is to study a few of his charts and diagrams. He is unusual in providing his readers with elaborate engravings which summarize his views. But as the brilliant Renaissance historian Frances Yates has observed, these engravings are intended to be more than illustrations: they are part of the remarkable Renaissance practice known as the Art of Memory, a mnemonic device used not simply to retain ideas, but to bring to mind archetypal patterns, reminders of the deep significance of the otherwise scattered and unreflected mass of everyday events. Fludd turned to music theory for the development of this art and his philosophy; therefore, before examining his charts a few basic facts about musical acoustics should be understood.

The diatonic scale is the basis of most western music—seven tones which when played or written one after the other form an octave. The eighth tone is a repetition of the first; we actually hear the eighth tone or octave as the same note at a higher pitch. In Fludd's charts the lowest note is written as a 'G' or the Greek gamma. Long before Fludd, theorists and philosophers had made ample use of the correspondence between the seven-note octave and the seven classical planets of astrology; the celebrated "Music of the Spheres" derives from this numerical and numerological connection.

Next, one should know that in music history there was an evolution in sensitivity to musical intervals (two tones sounding together or in sequence) regarding their purity of consonance. For Fludd and his ancestors the octave was heard as the most pure interval; the fifth was next, followed by the fourth. The third, though quite common in England long before Fludd and perfectly consonant today, was once heard as quite unstable. The diminished fifth (three whole tones—the tritone) was so unstable as to be called the "devil in music." Pythagoras is credited in legend for having discovered that the three most consonant intervals represent the simplest musical proportions, namely 2:1 (octave); 3:2 (fifth); and 4:3 (fourth).

A final musical fact that suggests an interpretive reading of Fludd's charts is the phenomenon of overtones. When a tone is played on a piano or other instrument, its characteristic pitch sounds as the lowest tone, called the fundamental. But at the same time many other pitches come through, more faintly. Octaves, fifths, and fourths sound most strongly, followed by thirds, sevenths, and other tones. When a low tone on a piano is free to vibrate and someone with a flute plays a note which is one of the strong overtones of the piano's 'fundamental,' the piano string will vibrate in proportion and pitch corresponding to that particular overtone. This phenomenon of equal pitches setting each other in motion is called "sympathetic vibration," and it is an idea used in the fifteenth century by Marsilio Ficino—one of Fludd's favorite sources—as a metaphor for astrological influences.

All these facets of musical acoustics might become clearer as we see them at work in Fludd's charts. Explanations of these charts are quite accessible in a number of publications, so instead of reviewing those commentaries we can look at the charts more with interpretation in mind than explanation.

**The Temple of Music:** This engraving shows an imaginal building, one hardly intended for mortar and bricks. This temple of music brings together all of Fludd's basic ideas on music: the importance of time and timing. Father Time above the clock which shows the rhythmic values of notes; Apollo and his lyre; Pythagoras hearing the pure intervals ring out on anvils; various scales and modes; the Muse of Music; the spiral portals of the ears; and the traditional division of music into three kinds: instrumental, cosmic, and human. A work of archetypal memory, this temple is a "reminder" that music is an aspect of the entire universe of nature and the soul. As Frances Yates has noted, musical proportions are built into architecture, while buildings in turn mirror the cosmos. Music then is a way of perceiving anything and everything. When one thinks of nature and of human experience musically, certain dimensions come to mind which would otherwise go unnoticed, especially—as the Temple of Music demonstrates—timing and proportion. Those intriguing spirals near the top of the temple hint at an aural way of perceiving reality. Events come pouring into the ears, drawn deep within for reflection. We like to talk about visionaries and about the importance of insight, but Fludd's temple directs our attention away from sight to the subtleties of hearing. The point is not that music is a part of life, but that the whole of experience can be "heard" through the perspective and metaphors of music.

**The Macrocosm and Human Being:** This chart shows several of Fludd's abiding interests. The musical scale, starting at the bottom with 'G' (gamma), ascends three octaves (diapason=octave, disdiapason=two octaves). Fludd's captions at the outer spheres show his continuous attempt to connect cosmic and human values: mundane harmony on the left, human harmony on the right. What is particularly interesting is the portioning of spiritual and material reality, each seen here as a double octave. The two octaves overlap in the middle octave forming the the mediating celestial octave in which are the seven tones of the planets. The corporeal octave is made up of the four classical elements divided into seven parts: earth; salt water; low, medium, and high air; and finally fire. These are correlated to the planets and to the purely spiritual, trans-celestial realm of divinity. Spanning the entire three octaves is a human profile—all octaves resound within the human being.

Fludd had read in Ficino's most popular book, *De Vita*, that intellect and body are useless without the mediating intervention of the soul, a notion which is by no means anachronous today. The images of the soul or psyche, represented here as the planets—multiple and distinct—give elemental body to spiritual ideas, thought, and contemplations, while they also lift material, literal, and unconscious involvement in the physical world towards spiritual understanding. Imagination plays the mediating role, the *mundus imaginalis* depicted in Fludd as the astrological octave resonating in both spiritual and corporeal existence.

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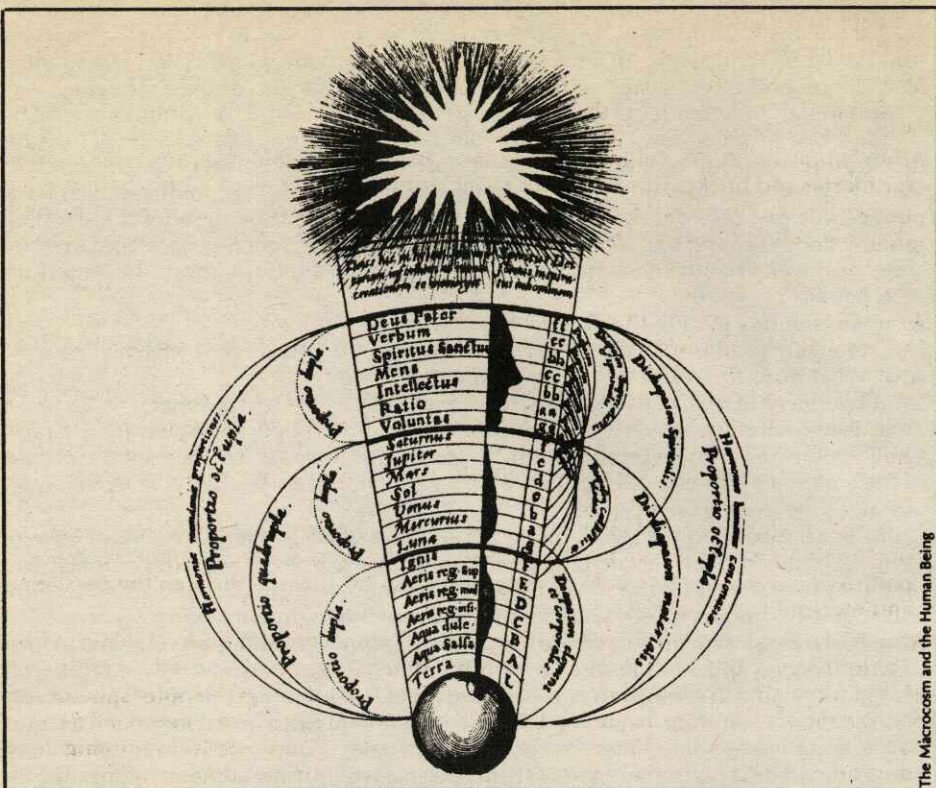


**Three Octaves of the Soul:** The same idea is developed somewhat differently in this extraordinary engraving which seems to parallel in a general way the chakras of Indian meditation. Here the elemental level of experience is portioned in the classical fourfold manner, while the third octave is given to the nine ranks of angels. Fludd notes in the outermost semicircle that the entire chart represents the three regions of the world which constitute the human soul. He also positions the body at the bottom, within the three octaves of soul, and labels it (note F) "the receptacle of all things." The chart expresses the ancient idea that everything is in soul, or ensouled. Indeed, Fludd was accused of flagrant "panpsychism." We might say today that plain corporeal life as well as ideas and spiritual institutions need the images of soul to complete the human range of understanding. Here there is no polarity between spirit and body, but rather an ever-present mediating range between the entirely disembodied angels and the merely corporeal concrete reality. The human body lying at the base of the three octaves may be seen, in fact, as the concrete world of daily life which resonates with octaves of an ensouled physical, psychological, and spiritual significance. All three differentiated levels are overtones which can be heard within the mundane.

This chart contains a rather significant complication, indicating that all three octaves are "portions" of the soul. We have seen that elsewhere Fludd labels only the median octave "anima." One way of understanding this is to recall the mediating role of the soul. As the Hermetic tradition taught, soul has something in it of the body, something of the spirit. With soulful meditation then, even spiritual and material activities could be ensouled. Jung and Hillman have taken observations like these from older literature to mean that *anima* consciousness provides depth, reflection, imagination, valuing, and a sensitivity for the metaphoric and symbolic dimensions of all experience. For them the word "psychological" means "of the psyche or soul." In this specific sense we might interpret Fludd to mean that psychological consciousness can infuse all material and spiritual endeavors, giving them imaginative articulation and understanding. Even the elements may be psychological: for example, earthiness, grounding, substance, footing, density—these may be the earth-characteristics of the subtle or psychological body. And the same is true for the other elements; a notion, by the way, that astrologers use when they give each sign of the zodiac an elemental character. Fludd in a similar way correlates each element with a planet and with the ranks of angels, suggesting that there are specific connections between our more abstract, non-verbalized insights (angels), the basic patterns which shape our lives (planets), and the elements of existence. Though the angelic intuitions are three octaves removed from plain, unreflected experience, they are echoes of a deeply felt resonance and are in touch with daily life through the medium of an animating imagination.

**The Monochord:** Fludd provided several engravings of monochords in his books, and apparently he actually worked with the instrument. According to tradition Pythagoras developed his ideas of musical proportion through experiments on the monochord which, as the name denotes, is a single-stringed instrument.

In this engraving we have further differentiation of Fludd's musical world. Here besides octaves we find fifths (*diapente*) and fourths (*diatesseron*)—two pure intervals which when joined together form an octave. The material octave is made up of the diatesseron of the four elements, plus the first three planets and half of the sun. Sol here marks the division between the material octave and the formal octave. Again, Fludd had read Ficino, author of a tract entitled *De Sole*, for whom solar consciousness was central and attributed to Apollo. The Apollonic sun therefore is positioned as a bridge of intelligence and understanding, connecting matter and spirit. The sun in this diagram epitomizes the mediating octave of the other charts. Solar intelligence is the special sensibility which can connect the lower world with the upper; the lower but not unimportant experiences of emotion, fantasy, relationship, disease, and the body in general with the region of intellect and religion. When religious concern and philosophical exploration seem "up in the air," in an "ivory tower," dry and remote, perhaps they have lost Fludd's solar meditation. Apollo, it is true, is often identified with distant and remote knowledge, but Ficino wrote about him as a brother of the very physical Dionysus; and Fludd depicts him with his lyre—that instrument which, at least in its earlier forms, keeps strings in tension between two poles. Fludd's sun mediates and promotes the harmonics of overtones and rich resonance.



In some of his non-musical engravings, Fludd condenses the Neoplatonic and Hermetic idea of the soul's descent and return in the figure of two intersecting triangles or pyramids. These charts are similar to the Seal of Solomon or to the six-pointed star, both seen as intersecting triangles, and to the interpenetrating gyres described by WB Yeats in his book of lunar cycles, *The Vision*. Fludd takes this flat, geometric image and transforms it through the medium of music. Just as tones echo themselves at the distance of octaves, sounding the same except at a higher pitch, so experience may be seen by the naked eye as a two-dimensional reality but heard with a practiced ear as having the resonant depth of spirit and soul.

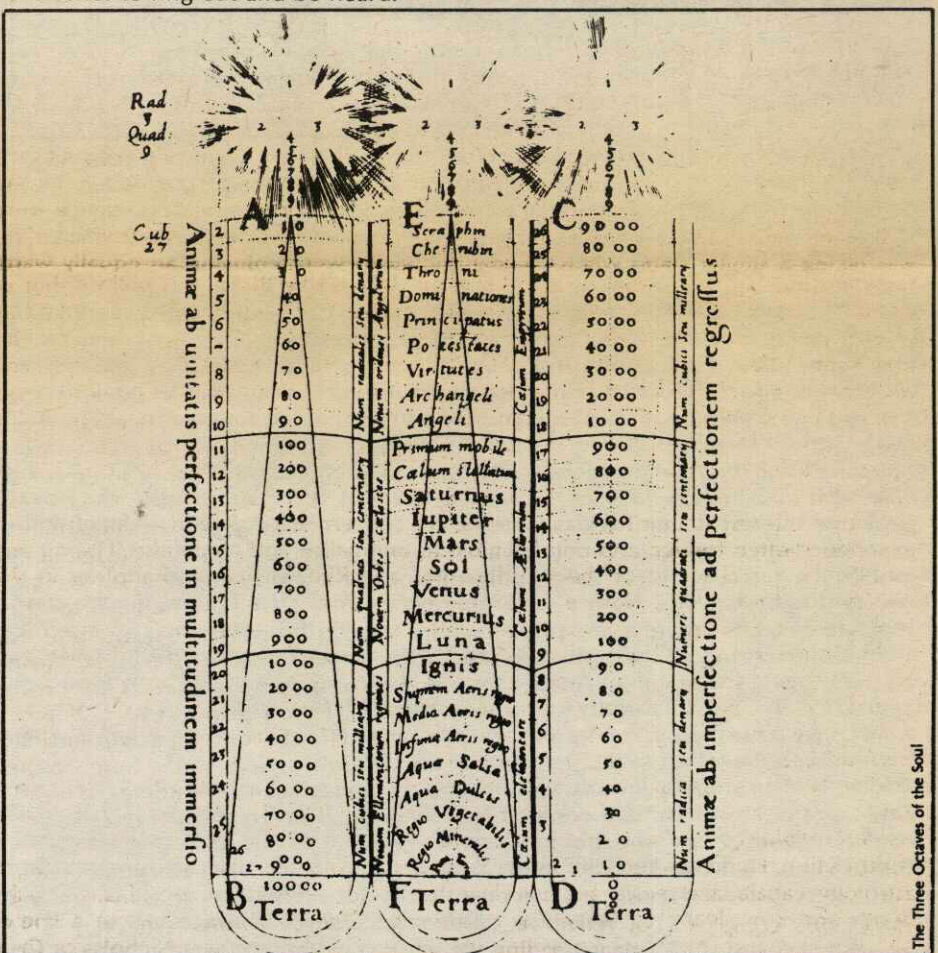
The point where the two pyramids have equal breadth Fludd labels the "Sphere of Equality" in some charts, the "Sphere of the Soul" in others. This is but another instance of Fludd's emphasis upon the traditional teaching that the soul by nature is a mediating factor between the corporeal and the spiritual. It is a point which cannot be stressed enough: the chart, and experience itself, suffers a gaping hole when spirit and body are allowed to exist separately and independently. This can happen when one gets caught

up in disembodied ideas and intellectual gamesmanship, or even in spiritual practices and religious fervor. How often such attention to spirit has occasioned a low estimation of the material world, daily commerce, emotional entanglements, and the general complexity of everyday life. Or conversely, absorption in matter brings with it a passionless regard for things of the spirit: congregations going through the motions of church services, or a financially successful middle class family out of tune with the arts, the spiritual side of nature, and religious traditions.

Soul completes the "harmony" Fludd sketches in his engravings. "Harmony" here by the way does not mean tepid, utopian peacefulness and lack of conflict, but—in the Pythagorean sense—full representation of parts, good proportion. And as Ficino had taught Fludd, there is dissonance in that harmony; or as a young poet, Kim McDodge, once pointed out, there is "harm" in harmony. Modern depth psychologists have directed their attention to the painful dark hollows of experience, finding psychological reality in that "harm," in psychopathology and nervous disorders. People of the spirit or of body alone seem to prefer avoiding the more painful side of the soul-dimension, meditating themselves out of it, or dissolving it in alcoholic spirits, or in manic spirited activity.

Fludd however shows that the octave of soul is astrological. It is a sphere in which the planets depict the full scale of human possibilities. His own words are rather clear: "The intervals of harmony are in the archetypal world [*mundo archetypico*] from the beginning and are infused into the human soul." It is a sphere in which the astrological signs differentiate the basic characteristics of psychological life, and the houses sort out the contexts in which those characteristics are lived out. These are strong overtones, close to the heart of experience.

Peter J. Amman, one of a number of London scholars who have provided imaginative and reliable information on Renaissance occultism, makes a point about Fludd's monochord which underscores the emphasis upon the mediating soul. He mentions that for Fludd the octave was the most pure interval, followed by the fifth and then the fourth. In the monochord engraving we find the material fourth (*diatesseron materialis*) identified with the four elements. But above these, forming the upper half of the material octave, is the fifth of Luna, Mercury, Venus, and part of Sol. This is the intermediate, etheric region beyond the elements but beneath the higher planets and well below the disembodied uppermost voices and epiphanies. Thus this "fifth of soul" or the psychological range proper is the quintessence—usually understood as the fifth element or essence, here as the planetary fifth. It is an imaginal refinement of the world which does not leave embodiment altogether; a range of fantasy, memory, and reflection purer than unreflective reactions of ordinary living, less pure than rarefied thought and contemplation. Fludd makes the interesting comment that just as it takes more power for the human voice to sing high notes, so it takes more power of soul to raise awareness to more enlightened levels. In alchemy a similar law prevailed: the quintessence or elixir had to be fabricated and worked out of the raw material. To say it more plainly, movement of consciousness out of literalism and unawareness requires an effort of mind and imagination. The stuff of daily life needs to be "sounded" and "played" at higher octaves, even at higher fifths, for its more subtle implications and overtones to ring out and be heard.



Fludd's musical philosophy is much more complex and suggestive than these few comments on his engravings can convey. We can look forward to translations of his works and more extensive studies. But his fascinating diagrams alone reveal several reasons why he deserves more attention: for his culminating role in the long and imaginative Hermetic tradition, for his exceptional use of musical metaphor, for his extraordinary skill at using images to convey the full gamut of human experience and understanding, and finally for his insistence on that part of his tradition which places value on the mediating function of psychologizing imagination. In Fludd we find occultism and spirituality without loss of soul and without disembodiment—a hint towards a solution to a problem which is timeless, enduring into the 1980's. Renaissance men and women of letters played punfully on the names of authors without shame or reserve: in that spirit we might say of this stimulating magus and musicus of another age that in place of stern and sparse abstractions, he offers for our self-reflection as individuals and as a culture a veritable flood of images.

—Tom Moore

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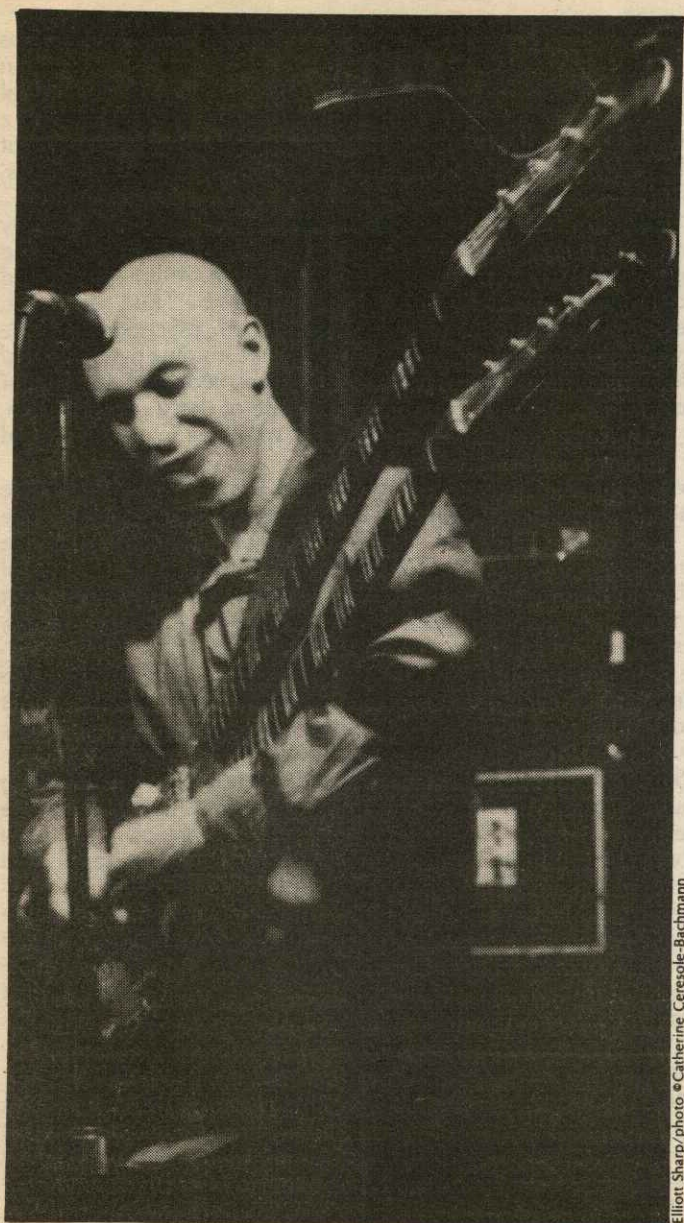
#### FOR FURTHER READING

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# INTERVIEW: ELLIOTT SHARP, part 2

Questions/  
Commentary: CH  
Transcription:  
Richard Behrens

Elliott Sharp/photo © Catherine Ceresole-Bachmann

**A/a:** A lot of the drumming in Carbon sounds like it's out of a parade.

**E#:** Right, a demented marching band. Well, these are pretty martial times and whether I'm contributing to it or just pointing it out I'm not sure. People aren't really polarized these days; they're in the middle of absorbing things, like big loaves of Wonder Bread. They're completely oblivious to reality. They get all their information from TV.

**A/a:** Could you talk more abstractly about human systems? I think that's what you're trying to say here: We don't systematize ourselves. We could be; the opportunity is there...

**E#:** I'm not sure exactly what you mean by systematizing, whether that's a positive or a negative thing.

**A/a:** I'm not talking about it in a negative way...understanding and devising your own patterns, being able to live more clearly through disciplines...

**E#:** It's also about restructuring time, like the way I hear rhythms... I mean, I like repetitive patterns but I don't like them to repeat: I don't like the mechanical repetition of cells, I like a pulse that's always changing and...where the metric system changes, where there're measures of odd rhythms, odd stops, and cadences that aren't in any metric pattern, just coming down to a basic pulse but always being interpreted differently.

I want to try this sometime with a saxophone ensemble: This system with the contact mike works with almost any horn, but it also works not too badly with the bass clarinet. Get a bunch of musicians together, each with one of these drum set-ups. The contact mike on the body of the horn is fed into a pre-amp to give it a little juice for the distortion unit. From there it goes into the guitar amp. So if you play the saxophone the sound of the instrument itself will be picked up by the amp, through the body, and as you're changing the tapping sound...hand me that horn over there [Plays horn with fingers]. I've developed a pretty percussive attack. I hit the keys pretty hard, but the contact mike picks it up. There's a snare drum sitting in front of the guitar amp and that resounds with the different frequencies and the different attacks on the horn. So the movement of air triggers the snare drum, and that gets the snares rattling.

**A/a:** In your work with bands there is concern for unusual meters and timing. Especially in "Marco Polo's Argali" the metrics keep changing.

**E#:** What it is, is it grows mathematically, by proportion of the Fibonacci number, and the rhythms are also increasing so we might do cycles, eight beat cycles to start, and within each eight beat cycle would be a little palendromic rhythm—symmetrical: 5-3/3-5, or 5-3, or 3-5 Then the next section has thirteen (which is the next number in the series) and that would be running 3-5-3, and that's our little triangle. Then the next would be twenty-one; well, 21 doesn't exist as a rhythm but as an ornament to a rhythm, but the next one would be thirty-four, and that would be 5-8, 5-8. From there to fifty-five, which would be groups of 11...

**A/a:** Some of the music that Philip Glass was doing fifteen years ago is very mathematical; it's not as cold as people make it out to be. Definitely the meters are changing according to some mathematic design.

**E#:** I always found his music to be too mechanical for my tastes anyway, the way they are constructed. I could appreciate some of the formalism that went into it but in terms of actual listenability and how my body reacted to it, there wasn't enough there to keep any kind of interest. Now he doesn't have to be bland or mechanical.

I'll play you a little piece which was my first venture into formal rock, which was a piece from 1974 in Buffalo called "Attica Brothers," and there's an electric string quartet, violin, cello, bass, and guitar playing a kind of blues melody that was harmonized in microtones over the course of five minutes...the second section involves improvisation within certain parameters, controlled improvisation over fairly heavy rhythms.

(Plays tape)

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In the next section of the discussion, issues of cultural hardship and change in New York City are brought up. It was these factors which led to the closing of several clubs in lower Manhattan within a three-month period. 8BC, a favorite venue for Carbon, was one of these.

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**A/a:** New York City is supposed to be the city of the arts, but unless you're a certain kind of artist, they really don't want you.

**E#:** Sure, they basically want art that can be nicely translated into objects for sale; they

want art that doesn't upset any kind of world view which is that simple consumeristic approach. [Mayor Edward Koch] will support anything that he thinks will get him votes, especially with the rising upper middle class. The middle class has been disappearing in the United States. You get poor and rich people, and the number of poor is increasing because they used to be middle class.

As this area is filled more and more with people who are more and more the same, all the poor people, ethnic people, Ukrainians, Puerto Ricans, Haitians, old Jews, everybody who made up this population on the lower East Side, as they're forced out by the real estate people you get homogenized white life—this kind of "art culture" which to me is really lacking. When I came here it was really exciting to be walking around and smelling all the different ethnic cooking, hearing music of all kinds in the air, not just MTV-style new wave bullshit you hear in all these stupid little cafes. As there is less stimulation people will find less reason to do art, and if they do art it will, to me, lack content and expression. It's coming from a different place... They only want safe culture, culture with a capital "K," things that can be easily sold and that preserve the status quo. And if they can encourage enough people to play the role of the bohemian artist well it's good for the city: the making of an art product that is saleable.

**A/a:** I think the City's idea of the bohemian must be Lou Reed.

**E#:** Yeah, he's pretty safe these days. I mean, people like Keith Haring. Keith Haring might as well be working for Wonder Bread. I really liked seeing his work when it first appeared in the subways or in the streets, but since then it's become corporate crap. Now if people find a wall to write on they think, Hey, I'm making some Art; maybe I'll get my picture in the paper. I'm hoping—I have to believe; and that's something about the insular nature of the art scene, that you don't really get to hear people when they're hungry and doing some interesting stuff. A lot of people try to find a way to bland out their art so they can sell it.

**A/a:** Are you getting more airplay?

**E#:** Not much outside of the colleges, but that's slowly changing.

**A/a:** I remember when John Schaffer (WNYC-FM) first started his program New Sounds: it was like playing nothing but the whole catalogue of EG Records every week. I think there is an inability to go really far out; I can't see them playing something like John's Classic Guide to Strategy [Lumina Records; Volume 2 just released].

**E#:** Oh I think they have. A friend mentioned hearing something of John's, and someone else called and told me they heard my solo bass clarinet piece "Effector," from the (T)Here record. The extreme on New York City just after some Mozart. Must have shocked some poor people in some office somewhere. I don't know: I certainly don't think times are great for any extreme musics, but there are a few stations willing to take chances, maybe not as radical as they should be, but they're doing something.

**A/a:** How were you able to do two or three sampler records?

**E#:** Well conceptually—that was the easy part—I was playing in a couple of bands in the neighborhood, and I saw a few other bands that we'd sometimes split gigs with, sometimes just slightly different scenes, but all people doing fairly interesting things. Definitely not in the mainstream, even in the underground mainstream. So it was a natural thing to put out a compilation.

**A/a:** State of the Union had a definite concept to it.

**E#:** Yeah, that came later. I wanted it to be Zoar's Christmas record plus, again, my continuing disgust with American politics. I wanted to have thirty-four people each put their two cents in as to what the real state of the Union was. My role was to sequence it, to make it coherent. My "composition" was the sequencing of the record, and each person's part contributed to the whole. Some pieces I definitely wanted to be longer, some I thought were just the right length. But I also wanted it to have a certain amount of structural coherence.

**A/a:** How did you connect with Berlin Atonal Records? They'd only done two live records before.

**E#:** Right, of Psychic TV. When Dimitri Leningrad, that was his name, was in New York I played him the Carbon tapes, which he brought back with him to play for the guy who runs the label, Schiek, and he decided to put the record out, which I was pleased with; he did a much better mastering than I was able to do for the domestic release.

Running an independent label just doesn't work for me. The distributors are really dishonest or just too slow. When you're an indie you're not treated too well by the distributors or the radio stations. I've been ripped off for thousands of dollars worth of records: it either comes out of my pocket, or from musicians in other bands who have put records out on Zoar, or from certain people who have been helpful in lending money, not expecting to make money, planning to get their money back, and in some cases not even that. It's just the incredible greed you see throughout the American merchandising system.

**A/a:** Are stations getting the copies they should be getting?

**E#:** I can only send out a certain amount, otherwise it gets too expensive.

**A/a:** What does the name Zoar come from?

**E#:** A couple of places. In Babylonian mythology the City of Light is Zohar; there's also a Zoar Valley in Buffalo which is my immediate source—it's a gorge known as the Grand Canyon of the East, an incredibly dramatic place. That was a sacred place for the natives of the area—it's also near the west valley. It's since shut down but it's radioactive waste, polluted, the Zoar Valley Gorge.

Just getting back to the whole point about radio stations, there are a lot of college stations, and you hear people bragging "Oh yeah, I got these records for free," and then they take them into the store and sell them, or put them in their private collection, and it gets to a point where you can't send every independent station records.

**A/a:** There are station listings where they have the shows; at least then you have an idea of who the person is. It's almost never full stations, only one show.

**E#:** I think people in remote areas are starved for extremity. I think people here are very blasé; a lot of their information systems are shut down. I also find that there is a larger concentration of people here who do extreme things. You go out into the middle of Kansas or whatever and there are certainly people making music that is important and who have open ears to things, but there are a lot more who aren't, who would just as soon kill you. Not that I'm paranoid, having been shot at in Kansas when I was a young, long-haired hitchhiker, and having seen what I consider to be the real face of America manifest itself at different times of my life.

**A/a:** How are audiences in the rest of the country?

**E#:** In some cases they're enthusiastic, although I don't necessarily find them to be too well informed. One thing that's nice about them that's flattering, they seem to enjoy anything. But that's also something I don't like about it.

I'll continue to do work as Zoar Productions, though. I just won't issue them myself. I don't have the money and I'm tired of getting ripped off. I don't even have the time, being a full-time musician, and I like to be involved in a lot of different projects simultaneously. I'm going to see who's available in Japan who would be interested in licensing Zoar things. Moers Music, and of course Dossier. And I realize that the only people who have a right in the United States to put out what I do is Zoar. That's why it exists; it does meet the need for this sort of music.

**A/a:** Do other bands feel like they can come to you?

**E#:** People do. I'm getting cassettes all the time. Unfortunately I don't have the money to produce other people. If someone wants to put something out on Zoar—a few have approached me recently—they unfortunately have to pay for it themselves.

Continues on page 7



# SHARP

from page 6

**A/a:** What's the idea behind PASS?

**E#:** Public Access Synthesizer Studio. Exactly what its name defines.

**A/a:** Do you have to show you have certain intents?

**E#:** No, that's for the Artist in Residency Program. It allows people to have forty hours of studio time plus tape and engineering. But anyone can rent time at PASS and use the equipment. They used to be more oriented towards performance when I first moved to New York. There were some great performances there every Monday night.

**A/a:** Have any of your records sold out?

**E#:** The first two are out of print, *Hara* and *Resonance*. A few of them have gone through the initial pressing and have either been pressed again or just let go.

**A/a:** Which ones did the best?

**E#:** I'd say the first ISM record and *State of the Union*. And this new Carbon record has done very well.

**A/a:** Has anyone ever mixed up your band with Joe Ism?

**E#:** Oh, that hardcore band? A couple of times I've gotten letters, and once at A7 Club a few years ago some guy claimed to be the other Ism's manager. He said, "You in that band ISM?" I said yeah and he said, "Well you guys better change your name. Our fathers are all high-powered lawyers and if you don't change your name we're going to sue you." I said, "Fine, have your lawyer send my attorney a letter, and we'll deal with it in court." And those guys are idiots. But I was glad when ISM reached the end of its phase, when it had to stop and pick another name.

**A/a:** When you record projects do you generally rent a space?

**E#:** We rent a studio. I like to work with Martin Bisi's studio. Some projects that other people have arranged the finances for have just been able to go and record, or to work on someone else's project.

**A/a:** Did you ever get involved with any Locus Solus?

**E#:** Yeah there was a Locus Solus trio, Rick Brown and John and I, that played a few gigs. John had talked about us recording but we never got around to it. We had also talked about doing a Locus Solus with David Linton while we were all in town.

Let me talk about a few projects that are [were] in the works. I'm composing new music for Carbon all the time, and there was a piece at The Kitchen on April 4 (1985) called "Sili Contemplation." This is a piece continuing the use of the Fibonacci Series and a kind of mapping or formula to describe physical functions into the music's construction. That's a piece for two trombones, two tubas, four percussionists, and myself. Some of the percussionists and some of the brass players also double on electric bass. I like multi-levelled puns: "Sili Contemplation" or Silly Contempt or Silicon Temptation. A lot of what it's about is the process of hearing, and the kinds of states of being. Silicon-based music as opposed to carbon-based music. I don't want to get into self-parody here or I'll get too tired out with my ideas, but I am going to work with this a bit more.

**A/a:** Do you like digging into language, digging into words?

**E#:** Language tells a lot about how people think. All cultural artifacts—language, music, the way they dress, how they eat—tell you what society is about. The best way to change things, to subvert things, is to know what you are dealing with both inside and out without letting it change you; finding out what they're about.

Also I like getting away from the roots of our language to construct forms and pieces so that you can deconstruct the type of conceptualizing that we do. We can avoid English, or syntax structured upon language, which is why they study Asian culture, or even the Mayan codices. You can see how they're different from our language. They're so rich in meaning because—you know the old saying of one picture containing a thousand words—you have information that's presented much more directly; the pictographic languages contain a lot more information, information of great subtlety, instead of using whole lists of nouns strung together when one picture can describe that information.

I'm working on a kind of a kind of science fiction soundtrack for a film that hasn't been issued yet, with Ken of St. Mark's Music Exchange, and he's writing a combination

# GIRA

from page 8

change in parts. It's just that after a while it starts to take on meaning.

**A/a:** The drum patterns fill in.

**MG:** I haven't noticed that...

**A/a:** In the material after *Filth* [1983] there seems to be more clarity of intention. Do people notice that?

**MG:** You mean that the material is uncompromising? Yeah, I guess that's all they notice.

**A/a:** It's not just a bunch of noises; there's a focus to it.

**MG:** Absolutely—it's extremely disciplined. There's no improvisation whatsoever, nothing random.

**A/a:** Would you say that there's an average amount of time that it takes a song to build up before you think it's ready?

**MG:** No.

**A/a:** Would you say that there are more responsive audiences in terms of location?

**MG:** You mean across the water as opposed to here? Definitely. The obvious reason for that is there's a support system over there which doesn't exist here. The press comes out weekly to support the new music that's coming out.

**A/a:** Well, the version that *Spin* magazine has of "underground music" seems pretty stilted.

**MG:** Oh, of course. But it's still a step in the right direction.

**A/a:** Can you foresee someone from *Spin* coming around here and knocking at the door?

**MG:** Yeah, I can see that?

**A/a:** Is there a difference between your private writing and lyrics?

**MG:** Well lyrics are shorter, more like slogans I suppose. I don't think it's necessary to be Bob Dylan, to be telling some kind of stupid story.

**A/a:** Could you see making a video involving those kinds of situations?

**MG:** Oh definitely. But I haven't been involved in any video work, and that kind of thing just depends on money.

**A/a:** How many years have Swans been performing?

**MG:** Altogether, for five years. But I've been in bands for a long time. With Swans though it's not that we're trying to impress you against something or an advocacy of anything, it's just our work. There's a big difference between a band like us and musicians who consider what they do to be a commercial venture.

**A/a:** All the photos that I've ever seen of the band make the members look insane.

**MG:** Ha! Well, that's entirely inadvertent. [...] There are so few critics who seem to have done any living whatsoever—they don't have any understanding of what it takes to conceive of something, making it, going through the whole process and struggle to put it out. They just assume that everything fits into their convenient historical perspective, whereas exactly the opposite is usually true. No artist or musician would ever think in those terms. But critics always write as if everyone does. One critic for *ZigZag* said we were "slummy"—that we were rich boys playing around with being dangerous. I'd read this of course just after I'd gotten my stinking construction job, so that once in a while I'd be able to eat. I'd been working for five years putting every cent I had into it [the music]. I would just love to beat that guy's face in.

**A/a:** He probably has more money than you do.

**MG:** I'm sure he does—at least he gets paid for what he does. Then some writer from *Melody Maker* said, Why don't these Americans go back to America and take Ronald Reagan with 'em? Who the hell do they think they are? We don't want their "hardcore" (as if we're hardcore), we don't want this shit that sounds like Black Sabbath. Then it turns

scenario/screenplay/short story. We're going to have a series of artists do stills from the movie, and the soundtrack will be released either as a cassette or a record.

**A/a:** Have you done any video projects?

**E#:** There was actually a video done of our gig at ABC No Rio once. We did one set as Carbon; and on the second set we collaborated with dancers, including Mimi Goese. We did a piece where they played with us, percussion instruments, also some of the percussive string instruments, contact mikes, as well as dancing. The whole evening was video'd.

**A/a:** But nothing along the lines of *The Ambitious Lovers* videos?

**E#:** No. ...We still haven't talked about improvisation.

**A/a:** I'd rather leave that out.

**E#:** Yeah, it's best not talked about. In many cases it's best not heard on record either. Just performed. Seen in a live performance, some of the dynamics come through.

**A/a:** I feel that for a number of people who've worked together over many years, the improv can be amazing.

**E#:** A group like the AMM, they're well worth looking into. They were an English improvising group in the mid-'sixties. A lot of things that they did later became accepted into the mainstream of what 'avant-garde' music was. The guitarist, Keith Row in AMM, was really one of the first to do radical guitar alterations, you know, laying the guitar horizontal and playing it with objects, and bowing it, and playing with radios. I think he was a contemporary of what Derek Bailey was doing, and an inspiration to all of the next generation of guitarists.

**A/a:** How about David Tudor?

**E#:** He was mostly functioning as an interpreter of Cage's concepts in the 'fifties. We're all post-Cage and post-Bailey. Sometimes I feel that grandfatherly influence very strongly, and my thoughts are mixed about that.

□□□□

## SHARP DISCOGRAPHY (partial)

### on Zoar Records and Tapes:

- Z1 *Hara*
- Z2 *Resonance*
- Z3 *Rhythms and Blues*
- Z5 "Escape Clause" single
- Z7 *ISM*
- Z9 *Peripheral Vision* compilation (producer, and with Hi-Sherrifs of Blue)
- Z10 *State of the Union* compilation (producer, and with Sonorexia, Hi-Sherrifs of Blue)
- Z11 *I/S/M: R*
- Z14 *(T)Here*
- Z15 *Carbon*
- ZCS1 *Ir/rational Music*
- ZCS3 *Moving Info*
- ZCS5 *Innosense*
- ZCS6 *Ir/rational Music 2*

### Other labels:

- Glass 020 (London): *Nots* (mostly same cuts as *ISM*)
- Atonal 3005 (Berlin): *Carbon*
- Dossier 7508 (Berlin): *Carbon/Marco Polo's Argali*
- Dossier (new): *Carbon Fractal* (inspired by fractal geometry of nature)
- Homestead (New York): *Speed Trials* compilation
- Touch (London): "Black Rain" (from *Ritual* cassette)
- audiofile Tapes (NYC): "Good For Business" (from *Hear the ROAR of Mountains*)
- Rift 009: *Semantics* (with Samm Bennett, Ned Rothenberg)

### With other groups:

- Liquid Liquid: *Successive Reflexes* (99 Records)
- Mofungo: *Out of Line* (Zoar 13)
- Hi-Sherrifs of Blue: *Music Notes Noise* compilation (Entarte Musik—West Germany)

out he had a gripe with Stevo and he was just using us as devices. But he chickened out—he wouldn't confront me face to face. So that's the nature of that. And what's really despicable is that sort of confessional school of writing where the critic embellishes it with his own personal experience.

But if anyone thinks that we compromised something because we did a dance thing, that's just stupid. It assumes that we were advocating something in the first place. Like, what was Muddy Waters advocating? That's the most valuable thing about music—the emotion that's contained. I get much more out of someone just singing than someone just screeching adolescent dogma. Like Aretha Franklin—I'm not saying she's great now—but she was a good singer. Johnny Cash... that's the kind of music I like. We just use the technology we use because it's necessary in making what we want to hear.

### —Questions/Commentary: Carl Howard

**PS:** "Gira in London now finishing Swans video. We will both be doing solo albums in August. Next Swans record in September-October. Two 'live' albums from Europe tour. And now... latest news: Gira's been offered book publication with same company that does Henry Rollins."

—Jarboe, 17 July 1986

These anarchists disavow authority, and say that you can get along without a central government that serves only the monied interests or the corrupt impulses of self-appointed demagogue. But you — well as I — that someone has to keep t — we going on & in this

compl — litical  
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 do — ch wishful  
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 power being concen — of un-  
 officials who know what's going — In this utopia  
 you are relying upon the honesty of dreamers to  
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# ARTitude

## INTERVIEW: MIKE GIRA

We need to investigate what we mean by "extreme." We need to beat this term the way we beat any other dead horse. It may just be that the most extreme lifestyle extant is that one which most "Americans" would consider normal: that is, the 9-5 businessman who pours his soul and spirit into office work with unbending loyalty, with the rewards of hypertension, pulmonary arrest, and stroke by the age of forty (are you a taxpayer?). In this sense "extreme" can be said to mean extremely taxing to the physical body. But is this not what's generally meant?

Certainly such a term can be applied to the world created by Swans' Michael Gira, whose protagonists seem willing victims of Herschell Gordon Lewis films, but who also represent a devastatingly clear vision of torment and apocalypse, or apocalypse through torment. But Gira himself is not these "extreme" characters, nor does he personally inflict these "extreme" values. He is himself a fairly calm, well-reasoned man, one who knows how to channel his energy into the volatile moment of performance.

The conversation revolved around the music of Swans as well as the lyrics and private writings of Gira; the changing roles of "underground" bands and media; and the increasing use of electronic sounds partly due to the entry of Jarboe and her nimble Mirage (the work of Jarboe has been well known for several years to members of the cassette-music community).

Several of his written works were published last year in *Forced Exposure* magazine, and it might be helpful while reading this interview to refer to them, if you can. Reread your copies now before the Federal Porn Squads come and take them away.

□□□□□

**A/a:** The music of Swans has changed a lot. Over the past few years the music has become slower, even dirge-like. Do you think the new material has moved away from that?

**MG:** Well I don't know; nothing I do is ever that calculated. A lot of the material is slow, but some of it isn't. Some of it incorporates melody, and is actually sort of subtle, I suppose. But generally it's just a natural development.

**A/a:** How do you feel about the response in England?

**MG:** You mean the fact that we got signed over there? Well that's good, I guess. It's certainly a more propitious market than America. But I don't have any preference for England or Europe over America.

**A/a:** Do you find that a lot of comparisons are still being drawn between Swans and Sonic Youth?

**MG:** Yeah, mistakenly so. We're friends—that's about the extent of the comparison. Especially as we've developed recently, we're less similar. I guess that's part of our mutual fault, because we supported each other so much a couple of years ago, played together so much just because there was no one else in New York whom either of us liked.

**A/a:** How would you say your writing has changed, or built up, since *Circus Mort*?

**MG:** I guess it's just become more concise, less idiosyncratic. When I write I like to make it as abstract as possible. People make the mistake of assuming that because I use "I" that's it's autobiographical, whereas, well, I wouldn't say that I'm trying to take on a character so much as present a situation. But I wouldn't say that they [the characters] have anything to do with my life.

**A/a:** I was surprised in reading some of your stories to find you taking on a woman's point of view; I didn't expect that. That's really hard to do.

**MG:** Well I don't know; I've never really started from realism anyway. But it was pleasurable to do that.

**A/a:** What kind of a frame of mind do you need to get into to do writing like that?

**MG:** Just concentration. Nothing romantic or excessive, or anything.

**A/a:** Has anyone compared that writing to pornography?

**MG:** I don't know; I don't get much response to it.

**A/a:** Perhaps when some work was published in *Forced Exposure*...

**MG:** I sort of regret doing that. I hated the context that it appeared in. It's a music magazine, and I shouldn't have put my writing in there. As far as pornography goes... that would be nice. For someone to say that they could get the same direct sexual stimulus that they get from pornography, that would be good. I mean, that's not my influence, but it's part of it.

**A/a:** How long would you say you've been interested in that kind of writing?

**MG:** I wouldn't really say that I'm interested in it much. I just do what I'm best suited for.

**A/a:** When I was reading some of the work I was thinking of the Burroughs cut-up novels in which there is the theme of dominance, of one person enveloping another. But in your case it's the reverse—it's not that the person who's doing the enveloping is becoming stronger, he's actually becoming weaker and ashamed, and aware of his own weaknesses.

**MG:** I guess that's the issue that I was interested in. Maybe it's sort of morbid to be preoccupied with that subject matter, but I don't seem to have any choice. So that's what I write about. As far as precedents, I guess there're a lot of them for that kind of thing. There was a Situationist writer, Raoul Vaneigem, who really liked that stuff. [He] speculates about having absolute control over one's life, and it got me thinking about veiled motives and veiled potentials in ordinary, everyday experiences. So whenever I work or think about a situation in which one person has the potential to be controlling another, I try to exaggerate it, to "What if this actually happened?" and actually it often does.

**A/a:** I think it happens more with insects.

**MG:** Is there much difference?



**A/a:** In the last section of the story "The Punishment" you take the sexual context and move it into a corporate context; people waiting to punish and usurp.

**MG:** I don't know if I meant anything corporate, I guess I was just thinking more abstractly.

**A/a:** Is that cassette that you did with Lydia Lunch still around somewhere?

**MG:** I hope not... I think some of the ideas were good but the writing was pretty shoddy. It's its own fault that it's misinterpreted as cheap shock. That's something that I would try to steer away from.

**A/a:** I thought that it was so strong in an image sense that I never had the idea it was going for anything like that.

**MG:** Well that's good, because I've heard of people in other parts of the country who listen to the tape at parties and giggle and snicker. Disgusts me.

**A/a:** Isn't that really missing a lot?

**MG:** Yeah, but that's partially my own fault because the exacerbation of that imagery leads itself to that. Wholly my fault.

**A/a:** I've observed two kinds of reactions to Swans material. Some enjoy being overpowered by it by letting it sweep over you, but people who don't know what's going on are like, "It isn't rock."

**MG:** They find it repulsive.

**A/a:** Apparently. So I begin to wonder, how far do commercial media go out of their way to restrict what music can do? They seem to destroy any original possibilities.

**MG:** By their control of the connections?

**A/a:** Their control of responses also.

**MG:** I suppose you have to have a certain gradual understanding of the context that something exists in. I don't even care about these reactions. I try not to even care about my positive reactions. But certainly it's not a gesture aimed at the destruction of the music or the advocacy of noise, or any of that shit. I can't stand that aesthetic at all. Most music I just don't respond to.

**A/a:** Is there anyone whom you do enjoy?

**MG:** Not that I can think of. I like Neubauten I suppose.

**A/a:** Have you talked with them?

**MG:** Well, one of them is our music publisher: Mark Chung.

**A/a:** Is Swans self-supportive at this point?

**MG:** No. It will be in the near future. There's good potential with these new records.

**A/a:** The last few records have seemed pretty exact in their approach to high technology, the use of the studio.

**MG:** The new material is even more produced. There's a lot of variation in sound textures.

**A/a:** How does that differ from what you've done live?

**MG:** Well what we've done in the past in terms of playing live has been much more raw. We've never attempted to relate one to the other because one has nothing to do with the other.

**A/a:** When I'm listening to *Cop* I get the idea that I should be listening to it in a church. The resonance is so full, it's absolutely liturgical sounding.

**MG:** Well that's good. I guess that's the motive behind it. In the old days the live show was much more physical, although it always will be—that's the nature of playing live.

**A/a:** There's a sense of drama in the music, of things building up to a fever pitch.

**MG:** If you listen carefully nothing really builds. I guess it's just through duration that it seems to build. There's never much of a so-called change in the material, maybe there's a

Continues on page 7



**City of Oops:** The big error in A/a#11 appeared right on the front page. Many have noticed that the photo included with the Edward Ka-Spel piece was not of Ka-Spel at all, but rather of Legendary Pink Dots guitarist Stret Majeste Alarme! Kudos go to In Phaze/Rhythmic Records for their ambiguous titling of the photo ("A Pink Dot"). A photo of the real Ka-Spel as he appears today can be seen at left. Photo ©1986 by HW Matthias, courtesy the real Ka-Spel.

See A/ad Rates in past issue, or write for details.